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THE HIGH SCHOOL CHORUS

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(Continued from January Issue)

Personnel of Chorus

It is better to have all the students of the high school together in one chorus than to have them separated according to years. The music will be better and also the school program easier to make out. Instead of a course of music study for four separate years, it is better to outline a flexible course of study in a four year cycle. There are a number of good reasons for this. The pupils will respond best to music that is difficult and of high quality. The older voices must be in the chorus to make this more difficult music sound well. For instance the Hallelujah from the Messiah will sound pretty thin with freshmen, but if there are a number of seniors in the class to give body to the tone, the selection will sound well and all will get more out of it. The freshmen will work with a will if they are in a class with older pupils, and the older pupils will be able to sing better if it is explained to them that they are making possible not only their own education in music but also that of others. This will teach unselfishness, co-operation, and loyalty to the mass.

Large Classes Best

The size of a high school chorus should not be limited except by the force and ability of the director, the disciplinary strength of the principal, and the size of the auditorium. A class much under a hundred is too small to be inspiring. From one hundred to five hundred is a good number. More than the latter is apt to be cumbersome.

The plan in use in the West High School works very well. The chorus is required for all students.

The pupils sing in chorus two forty-five-minute periods weekly. This applies to the freshmen and sophomores. The juniors and seniors must take this work once a week for the whole two years or, if they prefer, they may sing twice a week for one term in each year. If they choose, they may take this work through the entire year, as a number of them do, but they get no extra credit for the extra work.

In West High School the program is so arranged that the pupils go to the chorus room at study period twice a week. The choruses vary from two hundred to four hundred, and are made up of freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. In every case, the largest class is the best. Where the classes do not balance well changes in the program are made to fill out the parts. There are 1,300 students taking chorus at present at West High.

Since the pupils go into the music classes during their study periods, the other teachers are employed in the regular program. Their time therefore is not wasted.

As has been said above, a very logical way to begin a chorus lesson is to treat the chorus room as an auditorium and allow the chorus to enter as any audience does. They may visit quietly while they are taking their seats, putting their school books away, and finding the page of the first selection in the chorus book. This gives the young people a moment to chat, which privilege they dearly love but which they must be taught not to abuse. When the chorus leader steps to the front of the class, that is the signal for attention; books open to first song bottom of book resting on seat in front of student, body forward in a singing position. The chord sounds from the piano, the conductor moves his baton, and the chorus swings into the first piece without loss of time. They have had a little rest; they have been treated like sensible human beings and they are in just the frame of mind to enjoy their singing and get some good from the lesson.

The lesson should be divided into several parts. First some familiar selec-

tions should be sung—lively ones, to waken the class to the joy of energetic singing. A chorus needs this awakening more than any other class. Next, new music should be read. Finally, the lesson should be closed with familiar songs and one or two sung from memory while the music is being collected and put in place for the next class. A good marching song or some good popular song may be sung as the class is dismissed. Others of the school may join in and the whole building made to ring with the song as the pupils go to their various class rooms.

The less the leader has to say, the better, in all school work. The chorus class is no exception. Having the page and title of the selections on the board will do away with some talk on his part. Instead of announcing the page, the leader may simply point to the next on the board and proceed. He must of course make some comments on the music, but these should be reduced to the minimum.

Singing New Music

It is easy for the teacher to conduct the opening and closing parts of the lesson where the class is singing familiar music, for all the pupils do well if the selections fit the class and the occasion. The middle portion of the lesson, where new music is sung, will tax the ingenuity of the best teacher to bring out all the ability the class possesses. Teachers as a rule expect too little of their pupils. This is especially true of the chorus leader, and it shows particularly when the class sings new music. The pupils should learn that in all ensemble music, but especially when they are reading music for the first time, they are getting the best training, and that it is the individual effort of every member of the class doing team work of the finest and hardest kind that makes the chorus work perfect, that gives him the most good personally, and gives the other fellow a chance to make good also.

(To be concluded in our April issue.)

Music: An Essential.

Address delivered by Dr. Thomas E. Finegan, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, before the Music Section of the Pennsylvania State Education Association, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, December 28, 1920.

(Editor's Note: Read, study, memorize, quote, and widely disseminate this splendid tribute to school music! P. W. D.)

I regard music as one of the most important subjects to be considered in the public school curriculum. For years I have had the feeling that I should like to be in a position where I could have some part in putting into effect a plan which would accord this subject the consideration in the school program to which it is entitled. The subject of music has had very little consideration in school programs and often, when it has been considered, it has been placed in the hands of incompetent teachers. I do not know of a subject which can be made a greater power in the development of the moral and intellectual faculties of a child than the subject of music. I believe music can also be made a great power in the development of proper discipline in a school.

I have no sympathy with the statement so often made that many pupils can not be taught to sing. There seems to be a general opinion that the ability to sing depends upon some natural power with which pupils generally are not endowed. I believe that *all* children are endowed with this power and that it is possible to teach any child to sing. If children do not sing there is a reason for it and the reason generally is that they have not been required to sing. I know whereof I speak in this matter, because of a personal experience. I entertained the notion that I could not sing and most people who now hear me when I try to sing tell me that it was no delusion of my childhood. However, I *can* sing. When the head of the department in music told me that I should not be graduated from an institution until I could sing the scale, I learned to sing it. I have every reason to believe that if I could be taught to sing any child can be taught.